

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Blessings of Embracing the Lord's Invitation

By Elder Edward Dube

Second Counselor, Africa West Area Presidency

Consider the blessings of embracing the Lord's invitation during this Christmas season.

"Come unto me" (Matthew 11:28). These words express the desire and compassionate heart of the Savior and is His appeal for people to come to Him as a relief from their oppression. It is a call to turn from whatever they are presently depending on to Him. Considering the Savior's earlier rebuke to the people in Chorazin and the Bethsaida for their unbelief (see Matthew 11:21), I have felt His compassion on me. This to me is a call to follow Him as a committed disciple; it is a call to completely turn my life over to Him.

To fully embrace the Lord's invitation to come unto Him, it was necessary for me to let go of the things which are unbecoming to being Christlike. I discovered that success and finding joy lie in fully embracing the Lord's invitation. I may not enjoy this invitation fully while living on some selected gospel principles. I needed to come unto the Lord "with full purpose of heart" so that He could "heal [me]" (3 Nephi 18:32).

This invitation is a direct call to come unto the Savior, not to a program, nor a system or an organization, but to come unto the Savior Himself. This is an intimate invitation to develop Christlike attributes. This invitation is not intended to be partial to one group or class or nationality. In Christ, God reaches out to the whole world.

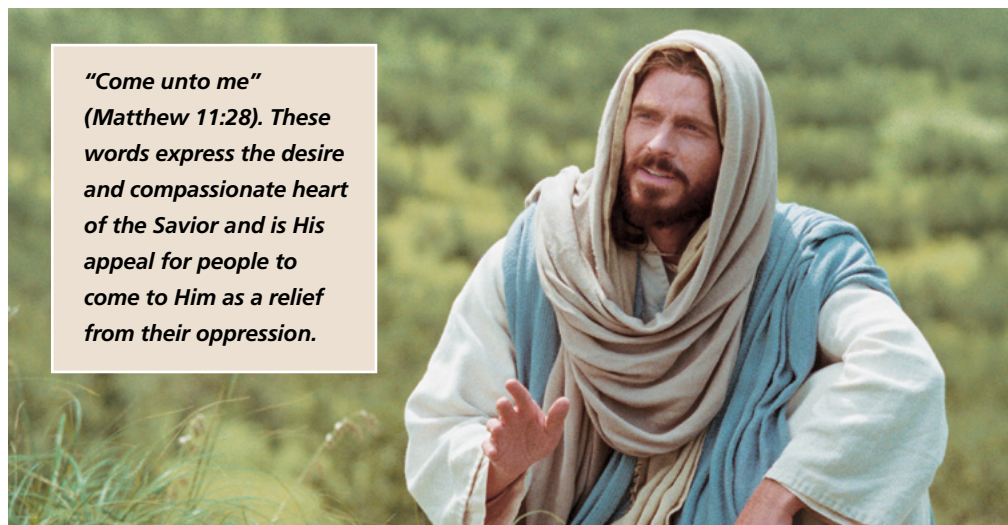
I therefore reflected upon this invitation on my early days in the Church. I decided then that I would choose to follow the Savior in every way possible. Giving my all for His purpose was my very desire and continues to be so, especially as I reflect on His birth in this season.



Elder Edward Dube

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me" (Matthew 11:29). This is a call to discipleship and how men and women find rest. Last December 2017 while at home during our summer vacation, Naume and I were in Madziva village in Zimbabwe. We observed a neighbor plowing with a team of oxen. As I saw this team, I was somewhat amazed, for one was a huge ox and the other a very small bullock. That ox towered over the little bullock that was sharing the work with him.

I was amazed and perplexed to see a farmer trying to plow with two such unequal animals in the yoke



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Church History in December

By Elder McCullough
and Sister Christensen

Church History Missionaries
of the Africa West Area

December can be a busy time of the year. Families often gather for celebrations and workers often take time off from their employment. In some parts of the world it can be cold and snowy; in other places it can be warm and balmy. During the month of December, businesses might see an increase in activity while others may slow down. Children as well as adults often have great anticipation and excitement as the Christmas holiday approaches.

The month of December has also been a busy month in the history of the Church. Just what significant events have taken place in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during this month? You may be familiar with some of these historical events; others may be new to you.

- **23 December 1805:** Joseph Smith was born in Sharon, Vermont, USA, to Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith.
- **December 1838:** The Prophet Joseph Smith and others were imprisoned in Liberty Jail, Liberty, Clay County, Missouri, USA.

and commented on the inequality to my mother-in-law, who was standing by. My mother-in-law pointed to the yoke and showed me the traces which were hooked to the yoke. I observed that the large ox was pulling all the weight; the little bullock was being broken into the yoke, but he was not actually pulling any weight.

My mind instinctively came to this passage of scripture where our Lord said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:29). In the normal yoking, the load is equally distributed between the two that are yoked together, but when we are yoked with Jesus Christ, He bears the load and we who are yoked to Him share in the joy and the accomplishment of the labor but without the burden of the yoke.

Not that the challenges or difficulties we are facing will be removed, but He will “ease the burdens which are put upon [our] shoulders, that even [we] cannot feel them upon [our] backs” (see Mosiah 24:14).

Regardless of what I may go through in life, the Lord is my Shepherd. His promise to me is real: “Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me: and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage” (Mosiah 24:13).

Just like the people who followed Alma who were in bondage to wicked oppressors, when they prayed for relief the Lord did not remove their burdens, but He eased them. The Lord in His matchless power and love strengthened them so “that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord” (Mosiah 24:15). I am convinced that the Lord heals the heavy laden.

He is consistently calling me to serve, but I work and serve in the strength which He gives. He is always there beside me pulling the weight for me, as I strive to yield my life to Him. The only time the load becomes overbearing is when I try to take over and do the pulling, or handle the load myself. It is when I look at the yoke and think it does not fit, when it is designed perfectly for me, in that it is designed to make me like Him but is also tailor-made for me, for the reason I may not know.

My invitation to all is to embrace the Savior’s invitation during this Christmas season and to make this a lifelong commitment. The Savior promised, “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). It is tailor-made for each of us and furthermore, He is always there with us to bear the burden. True, enduring happiness and success depend on fully embracing this invitation. ■

- **10 December 1845:** Men and women began administering temple ordinances in the dedicated temple rooms of the Nauvoo Temple, even before the construction had been completed.
- **27 December 1847:** Church conference in Kanesville, Iowa, USA, sustained President Brigham Young, Elder Heber C. Kimball, and Elder Willard Richards as the First Presidency.
- **9 December 1849:** Sunday School was organized by Richard Ballantyne, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.
- **25 December 1884:** Elijah Abel, one of the earliest African-American members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, passed away at the age of 74, just two weeks after returning from his third mission for the Church.
- **25 December 1925:** Elder Melvin J. Ballard dedicated South America for the preaching of the gospel in Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- **30 December 1973:** Spencer W. Kimball became President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- **5 December 1978:** Rendel and Rachel Mabey and Edwin and Janath Cannon, the first official missionaries to West Africa, arrived in Ghana. The first baptisms in Ghana were performed near Cape Coast on 9 December, with the

Cape Coast Branch being organized the next day, 10 December.

- **1 December 1990:** The government of Ghana permitted Church activities to resume following the “Freeze.”
- **December 2012:** Elder Jeffrey R. Holland created the first LDS stake in Sierra Leone in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

From the Africa West Church History Department, have a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. We hope each of you will have an increased desire to study the history of the Church and its pioneers and increase your appreciation of the sacrifices they have made for the gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

LOCAL NEWS

Church Leaders Visit His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio

Adapted from Mormon Newsroom

Leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints paid a courtesy call on His Excellency the President Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone at his State House office in Freetown.

The Church was represented by the Freetown Sierra Leone Mission president, President Kevin H. Clawson; stake president, Idrissa Turay; Bishop Albert U. Pessima; and Mariatu Browne, public affairs





President Bio reviews the country fact sheet.



Church delegation listen to President Bio.



A present for President Bio, Family Ties, is unwrapped.

director. The visiting team expressed their appreciation and congratulated His Excellency on his call to office.

Presenting a congratulatory letter and a family statue from the Africa

West Area Presidency, President Clawson said, "It is the tradition of the Church to visit and pray for leaders because we believe that God has a hand in making leaders."

He highlighted some of the projects undertaken by the Church to help the people of Sierra Leone, which included provision of clean water and extensive eye-care service.

President Clawson cited the significance of the statue of the family and said, "The family is the bedrock of society." This brought a broad smile on the face of His Excellency.

President Bio thanked the Church leaders for the visit and for their support to the people of Sierra Leone, especially those in need. He said the business of government is to also help those who are less privileged. He spoke about religious tolerance and said that the Muslims and Christians in Sierra Leone speak the same language.

Expressing his appreciation for the gift of the family statue, President Bio said, "I can see my daughter, my son, and my wife on this statue." He appreciated the family concept and affirmed the importance of the family, saying that it is from the family that we make nations.

In conclusion, President Clawson offered a prayer for President Bio and the people of Sierra Leone. He prayed that His Excellency the President Julius Maada Bio may always seek divine influence and recognize the hand of God in his election and that the resources of the country will be used to bless the people of Sierra Leone. ■

Massive Turnout at Laterbiokoshie Stake Health Screening

Members received education on healthy living.

The leadership of the Laterbiokoshie Ghana Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on Saturday 29 July collaborated with the Public Health Division of the

Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital to offer free health screening to members of the Church.

The event saw Church members from Laterbiokoshie receiving

information on health-related issues and undergoing series of tests from trained medical practitioners.

Members participated in the health screening, which included blood sugar level, high cholesterol, diabetes, eye examination, blood pressure monitoring, and viral hepatitis screening. All the participants were grateful to have received a level of healthcare traditionally inaccessible to them.



Members participated in the screening process.



Patients went through some screening activities and were attended by healthcare professionals.



Speaking in an interview with Mormon Newsroom Ghana, Dr. Philip Amoo, Head of Public Health Division, Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, explained that as practitioners from the preventive and promotional wing of health, their main focus is to partner with

organizations to help conduct screening and also educate the public on the preventive measures.

Ignatius Baidoo, Stake President for Laterbiokoshie Stake said the initiative was aimed at resolving



*President Baidoo, Laterbiokoshie
stake president, participated.* ➔

the numerous health issues that are brought to the attention of the stake presidency.

He added “This initiative has helped reactivate some less active members in the stake and I am happy. We are hoping that the Bishops will adopt this at the ward level”.

The initiative according to President Baidoo, will be done periodically to ensure that members stay healthy to live a fulfilled life. ■



Giving Cash Instead: Mali Cash Distribution

In the West African country of Mali, LDS Charities is working with another faith-based organization, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), on an innovative idea: What if those in need were given cash and instant access to money instead of food or supplies?

In the Macina District of the Ségou Region in Mali, last year's crops didn't yield a good harvest, and farmers are going through a prolonged lean season.

CRS is focusing on 1,655 households in 54 villages that had severely poor harvests last year. These households received \$85 in cash and mobile money during the month of June and payments of \$55 in July and August, totaling \$195. Five villages located on the eastern bank of the Niger River are so remote and inaccessible during the rainy season that the cash was distributed in one lump sum.

The Mali project is one of several cash distribution projects that LDS Charities and its partners are helping to sponsor. These projects operate under a simple assumption: families in dire need will spend money on necessities to keep their loved ones alive. One of the best parts of these cash distribution programs is that people get to choose what's best for them and their families.

Often, food distribution programs will give the same basic food items to families. These items usually include cooking oil, rice, beans, and salt. But eating the same food for months at a time isn't good for overall health, and many families thrive when given more freedom to choose.

While some might worry that giving cash opens the door for people to abuse the system, testing has shown that those who receive the money don't spend it on extraneous things—they spend it on what they need.

Using cash also provides a boost to local economies. CRS estimates that

more than \$300,000 will flow into the markets in Mali where beneficiaries tend to purchase goods using the money they have received through the project.

LDS Charities is proud to partner with CRS to help these farmers and their families.

To learn more about cash distributions and CRS's involvement with this charitable approach, visit crs.org/get-involved/advocate/public-policy/global-hunger/cash-based-approaches-and-lrp. ■

Source: www.ldscharities.org/news/giving-cash-instead-mali-cash-distribution



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